

# Views from the Field

*Commentary on Issues Affecting Air Force Civil Engineering*

## **“Heroes of Defusion”**

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The fifth day of October in the year 2000 will forever mark a personal milestone. It was the day of my first duties as a *bona fide* on-scene commander.

On-scene commanders respond to incidents where hazardous conditions exist. They are usually not the first on scene. The first responders are usually fire, police or medical personnel, and among them is the incident commander. In the majority of the cases, the incident commander remediates the problem before a more senior on-scene commander is called or even needed.

On this day, the Andersen Air Force Base command post received a request from the Guam Police Department for an explosive ordnance disposal team to dispose of a bomb found at a remote site off base. Permission was granted and a two-man EOD team was dispatched: MSgt Larry Senst and SSgt Jack Burleigh of the 36th Civil Engineer Squadron.

Sergeant Senst, the incident commander, located the bomb in dense jungle about five miles outside Andersen's back gate. He reported to the command post that it was indeed a live bomb, probably from World War II, with fuse intact.

Since remediation required liaison between the landowner, the police department and the local mayor, I was called to be the on-scene commander. I brought with me Capt Aaron Altwies, 36th CES, Capt Brian Thompson, from the 36th Air Base Wing judge advocate office, and SSgt Robert Pullen, from 36th ABW public affairs. Within minutes we were there, meeting the “heroes of defusion,” Sergeants Senst and Burleigh.

Was I impressed! Calm, cool and collected, they guided me through dense jungle to the bomb site. Fearlessly, they strolled to within inches of a horrific ordnance

that could explode at any moment at the slightest provocation. Sergeant Senst quickly explained the type of bomb, the potential fuses used, and a strategy to defuse the bomb. All he would need were some C4 explosives and blasting caps, which I knew nothing about. Having previously reviewed Senst's personnel folder, I knew he was qualified to diagnose and remediate the problem. “Approved,” I said.

It was hot, humid, rainy, muddy and a thousand other adjectives for uncomfortable. But the heroes of defusion were not even breaking a sweat. They trained for this. They lived for this. There was no fear in them, only duty.

I radioed back to Andersen for the needed equipment and within a short time it was brought to the scene by two more EOD professionals, SSgts David Toombs and Ysidro Gonzalez. These men gave me a quick tutorial on C4 and explained the specific objectives of the defusing operation. Together with Senst and Burleigh, they scouted the site and laid preparatory equipment in place.

Soon it was time for all but Senst and Burleigh to back out to the periphery of the EOD cordon, about one-half mile away. We did. At the outer control point I met with the mayor of Yigo, Robert Sanchez Lizama. Together we marveled at the professionalism and bravery of the EOD team. More than 50 times a year they gladly perform life-saving duties from which others recoil.

Soon we heard a small blast. A small blast is the sign of success — bomb defused without bomb explosion.

“It was a successful operation,” came the report.

Soon we headed back to base, I savoring my first on-scene commander experience. In years to come I'll exaggerate and tell of my dangerous trek through the jungle, coming face to face with a dreaded bomb from the gravest war of the 20th century. But when I remember October 5, 2000, it'll really be the heroes of defusion who leap first to mind.